Jack V. Haney, The Complete Russian Folktale. Vol. 5: Russian Legends (2003)
Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe. xxviii + 211 pp. $65.00 (cloth). ISBN 1-56324-493-4.

Volumes 1–4 of Professor Jack V. Haney's series, The Complete Russian Folktale, were reviewed in the Fall 2003 issue of Folklorica [37-41]. Volume Five, Russian Legends, continues the series. The folktales in this volume represent tale types 750–849 in the Aarne-Thompson (AT) classification system. Compared to the wondertales (or fairy tales) in volumes 3–4, these narratives may be less familiar to many readers, and are more difficult to define. The Aarne-Thompson index refers to them as "religious tales," while the East Slavic tale-type index calls them "*legendarnye skazki*" (legendary tales). Professor Haney chooses to refer to them as legends, but points out in his introduction to this volume that they fall between folktale and legend. While this is a problem for folklore scholars, who are still debating the differences between folktale and legend, the traditional performers of these narratives freely moved between and combined the two.

In both Russian and Western folklore studies, the term "legend" is used to designate a prose narrative which the teller and audience accept as true. Unlike the folktale, the legend does not have a special compositional or stylistic form, and the performance of legendary narratives may not require the same artistic skill that the folktale does. Russian folklorists distinguish historical legends, Christian or religious legends, and "superstitious tales," among others. The last group includes narratives referred to in Western folklore scholarship as memorates or fabulates (equivalent Russian terms are *bylichka* and *byval'shchina*), first- or third-person narrative accounts of encounters with supernatural beings (nature and place spirits such as the *leshii, vodianoi, rusalka,* and others, as well as witches, revenants, devils, and shapeshifters). Russian legends also include narratives about buried or other treasure, and local legends that explain the origin or disappearance of specific rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, or villages.

The narratives in Russian Legends are close to Christian and religious legends, but like most folktales, and unlike some legends, they are not set in a specific time or place. They often feature Jesus Christ, the apostles, Saints Nicholas, Peter, and Paul, the Archangel Michael and other angels, Il'ia the Prophet, as well as Satan and devils. As Professor Haney discusses in his introduction, many of these narratives reflect the influence of the medieval and later apocryphal tradition (such as the popular apocryphal text about the Mother of God's visit to hell). There may be traces of the Slavic pre-Christian pagan religion in tales about Il'ia (nos. 410 and 503). In some of these tales, a human protagonist visits hell, or observes the punishments inflicted on sinners there. Another frequent theme is the reward given to a poor but generous man or woman by a holy figure, while a stingy wealthy character is punished. Penance and redemption are also important, and some narratives concern a protagonist who saves himself or his soul from the devil.

The texts in this collection are probably most interesting for the light they shed on popular religious and moral conceptions that often differ from those of official religion. A very ambiguous Christ appears in one narrative (no. 404); after a poor widow has fed him and the apostles, he allows a wolf to eat her only cow. Only

at the end of the tale does Christ explain to the apostles that the widow will be rewarded in the next world. King David appears as an adulterer (no. 418), while King Solomon is crafty rather than wise in getting out of hell and into heaven (no. 457). St. Nicholas the Wonderworker convinces a thief to stop stealing in one tale (no. 504), in very tangible terms. The thief, forced to hide in the skin of a dead cow, is told that it is just as sickening for the saint when the thief lights a candle for him in church. In another narrative, a peasant "blinds" an icon of St. Nicholas Ugodnik and outwits a priest who had reproached him for drinking milk during a fast period (no. 505). Some narratives express the anticlerical feelings of the peasantry: a devil helps a peasant become wealthy, and outwits the priest who is carrying on an affair with the peasant's wife (no. 473). A reading of these tales reveals a complex attitude toward the Christian religion; while there is reverence and awe before the divine, concern with the problems of good and evil, sin and redemption, these narratives bring the holy figures "down to earth," make them more concrete, and sometimes present them as adversaries.

Other tales in this collection also display typically Russian or East Slavic folk conceptions. The earth does not accept the body of a dead man who has been cursed by his mother (no. 419). In a humorous narrative, a young man sent to hell is given the task of guarding hundreds of souls. He agrees to release the souls to an angel in exchange for half a bottle of vodka, and then the devils release him from hell, thinking he has eaten the souls (no. 453). A number of the tales are close to fairy tales or wondertales. No. 465, the tale of the Sea Tsar and Vasilisa the Wisest, is essentially a version of AT 313, but with an unusual ending: the man who has unwittingly promised his son to the devil manages to outsmart the devil by hiding his son in dog and goat skins. Readers more familiar with the fairy tales will find that certain common motifs are sometimes used differently in these "religious tales." In text no. 403, the hero is told he may go into all but three rooms of a stranger's house. But in this case, looking into the "forbidden room" does not lead to a real catastrophe for the hero; instead, he sees his parents and wife boiling in pitch, punished for their cruelty and stinginess.

Most of these tale-types are found in Europe, with varying geographic distribution. Some are found throughout Europe, such as AT 791: In this popular and humorous narrative, Peter and Christ sleep in the same bed. Their drunken or stingy host beats Peter, and Peter changes places with Christ. The host wants to beat his other lodger, and beats Peter again. This tale type is represented in this volume by no. 446, and contains an interesting twist. When Peter and Christ walk the earth, women are in charge. It is the mistress of the house who beats Peter, and afterwards Peter begs Christ to take away women's rights. Other texts in this volume, while they may, in their general outlines, clearly be related to European parallel versions, nevertheless contain details or developments unique to Russia or the East Slavic countries (such as text no. 402, a previously unpublished archival recording). In some instances, there are divergences between the AT and East Slavic indices, an indication of a sometimes distinct folktale tradition in Eastern Europe.

It is precisely the uniqueness of these Russian folk religious narratives, which are rarely translated and unfortunately not well known, that will be of great interest to students and scholars of folklore, especially those who do not read Russian. As in the preceding volumes in this series, Professor Haney's annotations and the arrangement by AT tale-type number place these narratives in an international context and facilitate comparative

study, and the excellent translation and judicious choice of sources (many obscure or difficult of access) combine to provide special insight into Russian traditional oral literature and folk religion.

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